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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLY -- No. 28

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A radio talk by Mr. W. W. Vincent, chief, western district, Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered through Station KGO, San Francisco, and associated Broadcasting stations, Thursday, December 18, 1930.

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Good morning, folks! This is your Government representative's twenty-eighth talk on Safeguarding your Food and Drug Supply. I have covered many of the products included in that huge total of twenty-one billion dollars which is annually spent for food by the American people. Recall, I told you that one large food concern estimated that one-quarter of the annual income of the American people was spent for food. If you are one of those who think this label-reading business isn't important, let me tell you that I am certain that if you consumers would read labels intelligently and apply some of this information that I have been giving you, you could save at least 1% on your annual food expenditures next year. A one-per-cent saving by the people of this country would amount to \$210,000,000. Folks, that's a lot of money and considerable responsibility rests upon your Food and Drug Administration, because they are entrusted with the responsibility of assuring you that foods and drugs sold to you are of satisfactory quality and properly labeled. Last week I told you something about confectionery. The American public will spend a lot of money for confectionery this week. I hope they read the labels to see that they get full-pound boxes where they expect such.

Today, I will tell you about poultry. Lots of turkeys, chickens and ducks greet you wherever you turn. Your Food and Drug Administration is interested in poultry. They have done a lot of work in past years to insure that such birds as you receive will be of satisfactory quality. While the Bureau of Animal Industry, under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, supervises the production and marketing of meats and meat products derived from cattle, hogs, sheep and goats, which move in interstate commerce, it falls to your State, Federal and municipal food officials to regulate or supervise the traffic in such products as poultry and rabbits. How much poultry do you think is annually consumed in the United States? Estimates place it at one billion carcasses. Not all of this material is consumed fresh. Considerable is now canned and you can buy canned boned chicken, canned whole chicken, chicken soup, chicken and noodles, potted chicken, chicken tamales, chicken raviolas, not to mention chicken fat and sundry other chicken products.

While the great bulk of poultry sold has been of good quality, your Food and Drug Administration has nevertheless, had some serious problems to handle. You would think it was pretty hard to cheat a man buying a chicken, but let me tell you of a novel method of adulterating dressed poultry. This is true because one of your inspectors in the Western District witnessed the operation. Here's how the dealer did it. He attached a hose having a needle-like nozzle similar to a hypodermic syringe to a water faucet. A spring valve arrangement, controlled by the thumb of the operator, regulated the water flow. The operator would jab the needle into either the chicken's crop cavity or just behind and underneath the wing. No trick to introduce eight ounces of water into each chicken by this method, and my friends, it would fool an expert. I know of one lot of chickens delivered to one of Denver's leading restaurants which was rejected and sent back because of light weight. The dealer then gave each chicken an injection of water, redelivered the same birds, and they were accepted. I am glad to say that the use of such an instrument is extremely limited and it would ill repay any dealer to have that practice exposed in connection with his activities.

Folks, they used to ship a lot of cull poultry to market. Let me tell you something about the cull poultry business back in 1928. The bulk of poultry that goes to the table trade is usually of superior quality. In the poultry-dressing establishments, they sort out what are known as culls. These culls are supposed to consist of edible fowl of inferior quality, such as birds that might have been poorly bled in dressing, or very thin fowls, or specimens too unsightly for table use because of bruised flesh and torn skins. In 1928, many birds that were diseased were included with the culls. Poultry is subject to a wide variety of diseases such as pneumonia, diphtheria, cholera, tuberculosis and tumors, including carcinoma. Your Federal food and drug inspectors found a certain chicken canning establishment that used a large quantity of this cull poultry. This poultry was destined to reach you under pretty labels reading, "Chicken a la King," and other chicken food products. A comprehensive survey of the poultry business by the Food and Drug Administration immediately followed. Before the year 1928 was over, there had been seized under the Federal food and drugs act in our Central and Eastern Districts a total of 96 different lots of inedible poultry. Some had been destroyed voluntarily by dealers in whose possession it was found and over 86 lots were confiscated by cooperating local officials. The amount seized in our Eastern District totaled 256,637 pounds.

My friends, this was a serious situation. How had it developed? Competition among buyers had resulted in a practice of accepting lots of chickens irrespective of the condition of the individual birds. The killing houses could sell anything, so killing-house operators took the sick and droopy birds out of the fattening coops. They slaughtered them immediately. Some establishments dressed birds which had died of injury or

disease. They included these with the other fowls which, because of age, bruises or deformities, went to make up the "cull" grade. There was one nice thing about the business. The adventurers in the business made it easy for your food and drug agents to detect these questionable birds. The operators packed the "culls" in barrels, while poultry suitable for table use went into boxes. After some seizures were made, certain shippers changed their shipping practices. They no longer made separate shipments of "culls," but rather took to including a few barrels, or sometimes boxes, under some private mark with shipments of better grades. As these were caught by Federal agents, they then began to divert the shipments from the larger cities to the smaller towns in the hope of evading inspection. Most of this material originated in our Central District territory.

But in a short time, leaders of the industry recognized that such business, if continued, would destroy the poultry industry. A meeting of commercial interests was held. Poultry packers, shippers and distributors from widely separated territories attended. This conference adopted resolutions condemning the shipment of inedible poultry, and also the receipt of inedible poultry by poultry killing plants.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, in an effort to assist the industry, offered, through the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, to furnish chicken canning establishments with a regular inspection service at their plants. Today, the majority of the large canning plants handling chicken have this inspection service. Under this inspection, each individual bird is examined when it is drawn or eviscerated and those not satisfactory for use are destroyed. This is but one development resulting from the enforcement of your Federal food and drugs act. The products which have been packed under government-inspection bear a label declaration which reads "Inspected and Certified by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture." Folks, that is no slipshod inspection. The identity of all poultry that passes through this rigid inspection is maintained until the poultry is either labeled, inspected and certified, or is rejected and destroyed.

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics is grading and certifying fresh dressed turkeys in our western markets this holiday season. Should you desire, you may purchase government-graded birds.

"U. S. Prime" turkeys are the highest grade. They will take a blue label.

"U. S. Choice" turkeys are the second best. They will take a red label.

"U. S. Mediums" are third, and will have a green label.

All of these are good edible turkeys and they will have a label on them, telling you just what grade they are, together with what sex and what age.

You should know what these grades mean. In order for a young turkey to grade "U. S. Prime", it must be soft-meated and tender, with a broad, full-fleshed breast, and with the back, hips and pin bones fully covered

with fat. It must be practically free from pin feathers, its crop empty, and bear no blemishes or dressing defects. On account of the very strict grading requirements necessary for a bird to be put in this grade, only about 10% of the poultry coming to the market will grade as high as "U. S. Prime."

To grade "U. S. Choice" the birds may be well fleshed, instead of "full-fleshed" as in the "Prime" grade; they must be well bled, the same as in the "Prime" grade, the crop must be empty, and the bird will have only a few scattered pin feathers. This grade of poultry is the highest grade that is coming on the market in commercial quantities and the housewife will make no mistake and will not be disappointed in buying a bird that is graded "U. S. Choice."

The "U. S. Medium" grade is a bird that is not so well fleshed as the two higher grades, although it must be fairly well fleshed, and must be fairly well covered with fat. There may be a broken wing or a broken leg, providing it is not bruised. It may have a few scattered pin feathers over the entire carcass. The crop may contain not over four ounces of feed. There may be a few skin bruises or abrasions as long as they do not expose a considerable quantity of the meat.

The fourth grade is "U. S. Common." It is the lowest grade. Birds in this grade may be poorly fleshed, providing they do not show emaciation. Advanced emaciation of a bird is evidence of disease. Such a bird is not of any grade recognized by the government. Any condition that would render a turkey unwholesome for food would not be allowed in the "U. S. Common" grade. The bird may, however, have numerous pin feathers. It may have two or more broken bones, providing they are not too badly bruised and showing blood clots, and may be somewhat poorly bled. The crop may not contain over eight ounces of feed. You will not encounter any turkeys labeled this grade in your retail markets.

Through representatives of the Dairy and Poultry Products Division of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, I am informed that the grading service offered by that Bureau will be available shortly on chickens throughout the country. Now that will please a lot of you folks. Think of the satisfaction of buying a chicken, with the Government grade label right on it--- a grade that you know is honest, and tells you just what you are getting. You see, labels are becoming more important. Soon you will be able to buy government graded chickens as well as turkeys.

Folks, it is the sincere wish of your Federal Department of Agriculture, particularly your Food and Drug Administration and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, that you find not only your turkeys but all your other food products just as you desire them. Now, if you want these grade descriptions and the other Read-the Label information that I have given you, just drop a post card to W. W. Vincent, care of this station, or to your U. S. Food and Drug Laboratory, San Francisco. Let's see 1931 make you a

discriminating buyer.

Well, folks, the National Broadcasting Company are giving me a holiday next Thursday, Christmas, also New Year's, so I won't be with you again until Thursday, January 8. In the meantime I wish you a Merry Christmas and may you enjoy a U. S. Prime or a U. S. Choice turkey for your Christmas or your New Year's Day feast.

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